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1948

The author's intention in these poems is to tell the story of the human spirit, and to present a little Odyssey of the mind. The collection shows the growth of understanding through experience and a searching into the deep and secret places of man's emotional being. Its inner creed is the determination to comprehend the worst as well as the best of life. Yet, though the whole cycle indicates a growth and a pattern, each poem is complete in itself and expresses a single vision. In form, the poems are experimental. The rhythms are based on speech rhythms; the language and thought are such as a man might use in private soliloquy; and the 'I' appearing in many of them is the universal 'I'.

‘TO-NIGHT IS ON THE MOUNTAIN’

POEMS 1941-1946

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IS ON THE MOUNTAIN’

POEMS 1941-1946

by

BRYAN CAVE-BROWNE-CAVE

GEOFFREY CUMBERLEGE

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Inscribed
to
MY FRIENDS

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NOTE

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THIS PRESENT MOMENT now and all the present moments
Till the end and drum of time, are all I ask.
The simple, wide-eyed, instant wonder,
Aware of breath, blood, life and the climb
And searching of my heart. Let me forget
The promised spring; there's winter beauty too;
To-morrow's blossom, hedgerows in colour, fruit
Of the laden vine are yet to come. Teach me this now,
This spending hour, the hurried meeting
And the shake of hands. Teach me this darkened sky,
This austere stillness. Teach me the silent falling
Of the snow upon the bough. Teach me to see,
That I may know this hour: the kind, the unkind
And, if must be, sorrow; but seeing always; not blind.

WHERE THERE IS LAUGHTER, there let me play;
What fruit is bitter, that will I eat;
Where there is shadow, there let me sit
Under the silence from the sweat of the day.
Where there is hunger, there will I fast;
Where there is loving there lies my way;
Who travels lightly, who travels last,
Companion and fellow, with him will I stay.
What life will challenge, that will I dare;
As life will suffer, so will I bear;
What life demands of me, that will I try
And as life wills it, so will I die.
And all in faith, gentleness and in humility;
As in suffering, so in my feasting and good company.

As A MAN venturing over the saltings
On a misty day, feeling the damp
Clog at his collar and the marsh
Ride dull and heavy on his boots,
And all the sights of day, familiar in the sun,
Transformed and hidden in the mystery
Of the still, salt mist,
Suddenly stumbles on a stone.
He pauses, alone, half chilled with terror,
At this violation of the immense
Unrealized stillness that enfolds him.
And then, right at his feet, rousing the dark,
The redshank, the warden of the marshes,
Rings out his warning through the mist,
Shrill as a sudden entry of the strings,
Above the hidden music of the sea.
The cries of gull and curlew
Shout in the silence; a sudden clamour
And beat of angry rhythm, as a host
Of frightened wings tatters the darkness;
A sudden thronging of all the wastes of grey
With shadowy forms; a half seen flash
Of black and white and orange . . .
And then the mists roll in again
And the sound merges and is lost
In the ceaseless mutter of the far-off sea.

SWIFT-SHAFTED energy of hammered, beaten light;
Brimmed banks of aconite; broom to burn
Brave gold; winds of flame and fiery bright,
Ring in my heart your wild rung eleison.
None but the poise and supple grace be there:
The cleaving sinew in the burst of spray.
None but the strength and joyous act be there:
The dare and laughter of the jest-wind day.
Sing me no sad, no soft eleison;
Sing me no cadence here. Ring out! Ring out! Toll
And ring! Prove here my spirit and my flesh.
Plough deep my earth. My furrow seed and fill. Thresh
My corn years, my rough will, with elation.
Batter my darkness with your wild-toned bell!

IN THE DISTRACTION of the day, what tiny movements
do I miss?
The glance of eyes, the tone of voice, the meaning
of the thought
That lies behind? Who knows? All these fragments,
this
Or that, life's weaving on the loom? Here is this shawl
I bought:
Old Kashmiri work, they tell me, forty years or more;
dull blue and scarlet.
What craft, what work is there! Why, in a single
stitched
And curving pattern, there is a full history
of living, let
Alone pricked fingers! and a few, poor months'
existence, snatched
At or lost in the artistry of the salesman
and the price it made.
And now, it lies across my knee, a token
of a life
I cannot even picture, because I never knew.
Who sewed
And who conceived this pattern, cross-legged on the floor?
What strife,
What memory, what dust-frayed clothes did they wear?
What did they talk of, what did they say
Sitting, stitching, watching the firewood ember,
that they gathered yesterday?

THE SWAN-BRIGHT brilliance of the frosts and snows,
A chiming whiteness, sudden-clear as bells
Or tolling clock; and glittering like a rose
Rimed with the dew, its petals shells,
Brittle as light-caught crystal, clear ringing
As sun-struck glass. Each grass spear frosted
With tiny gems; ivy leaves clinging
To elms like lace, jewel-encrusted;
Ferns hoar-fronded, each vein incised with light,
Vivid, beside leaves fall-shadow darkened.
A world, swift-beautied as a chaffinch flight,
A startle of colour where the black boughs bend
Beneath the laden snow, quartz-cut,
In cluster whiteness, sudden, delicate.

WAS IT CHANCE that sewed this peasant woman's skirt,
The full crimson rustling as she walks and the broad blue
And ochre borders? Or was it just the dyes and stuffs she
 had to hand,
Bought for their cheapness? Or did she with an artistry
 and skill,
That knew so well her country and her soil, fashion it so?
 She who moved rhythmically,
Poising her rust-brown pitcher on her head
Or bending to dig the roots with bare fingers, broken nails,
Her metal bracelets falling on her wrists
And jangling at her ankles. Did she see the beauty? Did she
 starve and save
And then create it so? No, but as birds and squirrels
Know their colours, she knew hers: the redstart, the oriole,
 the blue jay;
Knew too, like them, the setting for her dark hair
And glowing eyes. Knew as the soil and summer know their
 colours;
Knew as the fields know in their seasons what to wear.

IT WAS THERE I saw him, quite by chance:
A man much of my own build, but calmer,
Older as wise men are old. Humorous,
With a satire in his twinkling eyes; quiet
As a hill-stream that, flung downwards to the sea,
Now flows still and wide towards the estuary.
He was bending over the shingle, mending his net;
His head lowered; his square hands thumbing
The tarred rope; a charred pipe in his mouth;
And in the stubble of his greying beard,
The grains of salt caught at the sun, reflecting it.
And I knew, here was a man who knew the compass
Of the world; held it, servant and master both,
As surely and as firmly as he held his pipe.

It is so I shall remember you always:
The firelight on your body, supple and tawny,
So firm and taut of limb. And when I leave
Your bed, after the tense fever of desire;
After the fit is over; after we have lain together
Encircled in that weariness of loving
That seems to stretch itself even to eternity;
When reason would rebel, would argue in the coldness,
There's no lasting here: nothing but fretful longing,
Nothing but sorrow and a corrupting shame;
Then I see the firelight and the copper glory
Of your hair. My blood leaps. My body,
My life, my work, all yours again upon a moment;
Yours asking no mercy, without reserve.

I REMEMBER, it was after a year or more
Of parting, that we met. I would not press
My love upon you as for courtesy. Living apart,
We grow apart in years; time outstrips the old desires
And leaves old understandings cold. Yet I had not changed;
My love was hot; and seeing you of a sudden
At the open door, was all a pain of never parting.
And now, after another year, we meet again to-morrow.
And I sit silent in my chair; impatient
Of my book; restless at the passage of the hours
That keep us parted; uneasy for the absence
I may find within your eyes.
Once you laughed and then like a sudden April
Were weeping in my arms. May it be so to-morrow.

HE LAID HIS HAND upon my shoulder, so gently
And oh, so calm. But I, I could not bear it.
The comfort was a scald to me; the generosity
A knife. For his being so kindly, tore at
My heart. And I, bearing such anger, such enmity
Towards him, dared not admit his presence, dared not
Face his eye. To round on him in hatred! I could not.
Or yet to turn and leave him. I dared not.
For the scorch tears were fiery; the shame burned
My eyes. That he had struck me! That with his blame
I could have roused my blood. That he would taunt!
But no. He stood there waiting, silent and still.
I knew his eyes were a sadness and trouble.
I could feel his presence, so understanding and so, so still.

GIVE THE OLD MAN his way. His years are tired of time.
He's only a little longer now to climb the dales
Where his heart is: Shunner and Burtersett and the tiered
Stone stairways of Moss Gill. Remember him that day
On Lovely Seat, when the rime of the dark snow wind
Caught at his beard and how he looked: his hat tipped
Backwards on his head; his hands crook'd on his stick
And his eyes, wrinkled and bright, searching the twisted
River a thousand feet below. And how the words
Formed on his lips and then, as fitting there,
Burst forth: Keats, Hopkins, Milton, Shakespeare.
And the sound, blown like a mighty music on the wind,
Echoed and echoed down the valley, while you and I
And all that hillside, could only stand and stare.

HER EYES turned up to me, straining;
Words moved on her lips and then she died.
And in the silence: the dull colours
Of embroidery closely stitched beside the fire;
A children's nursery twenty years ago;
A hand stretched upwards turning out the lamp;
Someone singing softly, walking down the stair.
A tired face, knowing peace and pain; conscious
Of suffering past and maybe more to come;
Conscious of pride; submissive to fate; silent
But unafraid. Behind the face, wisdom;
Behind the eyes, a prayer. And now,
The last word spoken. Only a sense of presence;
A tapestry; a silent singing on the stair.

SHE IS GONE now, gone to join the long procession
Of the seasons, the eternal cycle of the world.
And what could be more fitting? What prayers or intercession
Should she need? For she loved all, the young, the old,
The sunlight and the shadow, the daze and fairy
Of the hoar-frost fields, the cobbled sky, the flame
And sallow of an autumn afternoon. Now and forever, she
Is with them. I will not call her or even speak her name,
For she is spirit. Nor will I see the earth wherein they laid
Her body. She is not there. No, but as the beech and willow
That she loved, the blossom that bore its fruit: red
Cherries, crimson plums and then in fullness vanished, such is she.
Sorrow?
There's no such reckoning here. She is with the seasons, now until
eternity.
So shall we know her, for such is immortality.

PUT YOUR HAND in mine. In this darkness, I cannot see you,
Yet with all the things around me that were yours
And that you loved, I know you must be there.
Strange! You were once the patient, now it's I who know
The sickness; I who need the comfort through the fretful hours;
I who need the guide. Come, slip your hand a little closer.
Not yet the pain, the hold on life clutched perilous
Above the pit. Not yet. Not that! That is the extremity
Of sickness. Maybe that way is yet to climb. Now, my sickness
Is the sickness of the heart: the commerce and the marketry
Of men; the erosion of the spirit; the dogsore of the mind;
The trammelled darkness of the soul; all we would escape from,
Yet lack the knowing how. Give me your hand.
Feeling you near me may help me not to fall.

I CRY for I know not what and yet the tears
Will come. I stand upon achievement; men
Honour me; and yet their years are not my years
And what they think and what they are, is gone,
Is vanished with the winging of my thought. Five æons on!
Wind, wind, you beat upon the grain store
Still; birds sing and still the white campion
Is flecked and veined with green; the shore
Tides turn and ducks light-wing the water, combing
The shadows where the poised clouds ride. But others live!
Not I! And other hands cut back and prune the bough,
Where in this orchard spring my blossom pears were forming;
Others must skip my bees and garner honey from the hive;
And other hands guide straight the furrow where I was used to
plough.

ALL SPRING's abundant life set swift against the sun
With a wind-cool, May-shower music.
Spring! With the blossom hawthorn and the briar;
Gorse fells afire and birches all in silver
As the night moth's wing. Spring! So surely given to life,
So surely born to bear, to fruit,
To see before the autumn leaves splash gold,
The wealth, the gallantry she promised and she bore.
And I, standing upon this hazard chance,
Must dare and daring, must hazard even death.
And all my spring, promise of fruit and flower,
A future's dowry to unfold, still but a task
To do; a promised service due to God; yet
Not half completed, not half a lifetime through.

WHO WOULD have thought it? To see him swagger
And to hear him laugh! Watching the throng of friends
Urging him on to some new story, some new jest,
One would have said that life had money in his wallet
And an easy confidence. True, he had company
Enough; a full stomach; and a knot of wrinkles
Round his eyes from laughing. Nor did he need
To wake at nights over to-morrow's food. Yet,
You would see his eyes, even while jesting, roam
Restlessly towards the door, as if expecting someone.
Not one of his easy friends, who laughed and drank
And then, with a final jesting, left him to himself.
And as he died, I'm told, he roused himself and stared
As if waiting for the door to open. But it never did.

HE WAS SITTING in his chair, his glasses
Hanging from his hand; face up-tilt, lips apart,
As though a moment caught and stopped in time:
Old roads, old footsteps and a childish rhyme;
A wind sifting the leaves across the lawn;
And with the slow rustle of the long-twigg'd broom,
The sound of the gardener sweeping the pathways
Beside the orchard wall. A child who made him laugh:
Grown up? Grown up to what? The same simplicity,
The same laughter? Married? Another life, that was
And might still be, somewhere; but dead for him.
And then, conscious suddenly of eyes questioning
His abstraction, conscious of himself, he sighs,
Puts on his glasses and turns again to read.

YOU HAVE ORDERED our parting; set your anger
Against my face and told me, go! And why?
Was it because I spoke softly what I knew?
Before God there was no malice in my words.
Was it the criticism I gave you of yourself?
What was there said in any tones but friendship?
Are we not here all human, each with our faults?
Are we not mean? Yes, I as much as any man!
Yet judge me to my face; I'll not bear malice.
That is the rotten core that bites so sour.
I may not see you. May not state my cause.
And yet I swear, the love I have towards you
Will not falter . . . not in all living! Nor
Should you need me, will I ever say you No!

SHE STOOD with a duster, in her flower print dress;
Short, stout, ungraceful, but still with a certain
Charm and brightness under the press of wrinkles
Round her eyes; and on her feet, a pair of slippers,
Cut, as she told me, from some threadbare stockings
And a worn-out hat. "There, there," she said,
"And to think I sang in the chorus thirty years ago!"
And it seemed to me, she stood there for so many
Of so many callings. Oh! and my heart went out to her.
For all the corn that never forms beneath the sun;
For all the corn that never finds the reaper
Or the stook. For the heart's longing and for the harvest!
Yet so it is. And maybe she feels nothing, no despair:
Only a little tearful as she turns to dust the stair.

IN THE OLD TIMES, Abraham was a master of men;
And Abraham was filled with a strange madness of the Lord;
And Abraham was life. Yes, life to Isaac and Sarah;
They lived within his mood. Life too, for Hagar,
Praying for water in the wilderness. For them
His mood was law: a famine or a sunshine, a harvest
Or a drought, a plague of locusts or a year of plenty.
Yet Abraham, for all his exercise of power,
Was bound as sure as they; bound to the course of God;
To the slowness or the swiftness of his blood; bound
To obey the seasons, his cattle and the ways of other men;
Bound to life as firm as ever he bound Isaac:
Isaac carrying the faggots, not knowing why; Isaac,
Who questioned: Where's the sacrifice? Why the fire? Why the
knife?

AN OLD WOMAN comes down the road, dressed
In a tattered shawl and a threadbare, rust-black skirt,
Latticed with squares of blue. She comes silently:
As night comes and the fall comes and as the frost.
I watched her face, but there was nothing;
Only a weariness, a strain of the years
And an age-old living . . . always night
And to-morrow coming; drained of emotion;
Set in a mould by time. I would have tried
To stop her. But she was past my ministrations;
Too tired, too old. So she went by, inevitable,
As day comes and the night comes and as to-morrow must.
And where she passed, the agelong, restless road
Lay winding; the dust-grey hedge on either side.

OH! IN THE FACE of others' sorrow, not our own,
That cannot touch us to the heart although we pity,
What can we say? Judge this man's wrath,
That woman's frailty, or that man's love
That binds him to the needs of others?
How shall we judge? What is the evidence
When there's but half the court to plead? And pity
Watching the suffering of the human heart,
Threatens to make us party to the tale,
Traitor to those whose pain maybe, goes just as deep
Although their cause is still unheard.
I may not condemn. I am life's listener.
I lay my ear to the breast of man and hear
His heart's beat; his brother, not his judge.

THEY ARE PAST our service who sleep
Beyond the sunlight; for shadow is certain,
Sure as the glory is the darkness, sure
As the blindness is the light. Poor man! Poor soul!
The wildfowl calls shrill through the vast.
The sound astrides the stillness, as with tensing wings,
She furrows the water like a skimming stone.
Who heard that cry? Did you? Did you? Who saw the limits
Of the sky? Who saw the sunlight scattered
Till the brimful of the water was a burnished brass?
Did you? Did you? How should you know,
Save once, one timeless moment, now or long ago,
You saw the shadow rended, knew the ground unleashed,
Felt the sharded brilliance, the vigour of the wind.

THESE sharp and savage whins, braziers of gold
And fire; chinked, studded shield-lights on these wild
Tempestuous moors; bossed, glinting sparks that glim
And ember, needing but the chafing of the storm
To fan them to a leaping, angry flame. Here
In this blackened wilderness of peat, where
Heather twists and dull, burned reeds
Tuft thin, there is no rest, no covert safety
From the sickle-striding storm; no hiding
From the ranking ghosts, faces fleer-fired, heads
Half-hidden in the lowering dark. Here in this empty
Vast, there is no God to rout these brooding
Shadows, bid the sun stand still, command the moon
Depart not from the silent vales of Ajalon.

AND SO IT WAS for that old preacher, telling
His beads at evening as the sun went down.
His lips moved on; but he, oblivious of his prayers,
Looked out into the strangeness of the thin,
Translucent mist that veiled the darkening splendour
Of the austere hills and found in the stillness,
A faith more searching, more elemental than his own.
And in that hour, he saw the emptiness of all he thought
And prayed; saw the abyss that sheers down
Deeper than loneliness, deeper than the grave;
And finding no place within himself to hide
From desolation and his soul's agony, he cursed
His God, and walking out into the wilderness,
Died there among the beasts of the field.

Is THERE NO BOUNDARY, no, nor compass
Set to pain? No breakwater, nor bar,
On which the angry sea must shatter and fall back?
Enough! Be still! That my voice, for my friend
And for my enemy and for all those toiling
On the clamorous deep, should carry
Through the firmament: Enough! Be still!
That flesh and blood, the grossness of the mind,
The unseen elemental power, might yield
To mastery so! That in our words
There could be medicine for ease; a touch
So calm, so sure, that in its fingertips
Was sleep. For all those toiling, for all those
Watching in the storm-wrack: Enough! Be still!

OH, TIMES AND TIMES I could fall like a woman weeping
On the armrest of my chair from old fatigue.
And were you to ask me why, I'd say: 'For nothing
And for everything; for the too-too fullness; for the vague
Uneasy emptiness that rides within my blood; for the dullness
And the weariness and for the old pain that winces
At my heart.' Be patient with me and understanding. It is a mood
Will pass; a sadness born of nature: in her childbirth
And in her ecstasy; in her longing for friendship
And in her finding of the grave. But come now, I am tired.
Let's talk no more. And with your leave, let's part.
And when we meet again the catspaw wind maybe, will shine
Across the water and I shall be content to join your jest
With laughter, But not to-night. To-night is on the mountain.

IF YOU would know men, then walk with me
In the deserts and the mountains and the tawny places
Of the world. Oh, that the shadow of the forest
Did not dapple my heart. Nor the cry of the falcon
Echo in my bowels. Blood! Blood! These very stones
Are rusted with it. What I touch must die.
Stand here upon this rocky plinth. The sheer gorge
Drops below the wreathing mist, precipitous,
Down to a turbulent stream, no broader than a thread,
That frets itself and all creation. It is in my heart.
Yes, and the grace and horror of these circling kites!
Look down! Look down! The mist parts a moment
In this windy cauldron. You can see the desolation.
No, no! Uncover your eyes. Look down. It is best to know.

OH! THAT this weariness would end!
That the wind that sounds upon the heavens
Would stir my leaves, scatter my sunlight
In a dancing shadow. Over the country,
Down the lanes, the pointed buds are ripening,
Beech and chestnut and aconites like glows
Of fire. See how they brighten! See
How along the hillsides the last snows shine!
All nature, all creation, bud and flower,
Surety within a myriad tiny leaves
Of fruit to form, apples to redden, plums
To bear. And here in me no birth. Not even
Forgetfulness. Not even the blindness
That never knew what might have been.

THESE MANY YEARS the mountain wind has scoured
My spirit. See, the little soil is swept
And there is nothing here but sterile rock
And the rough shale of a hundred thousand years.
Dust! Come plant your olives with their silver leaves,
Your oaks and fir trees and your sapling larch.
Too long the goats have garnered my young sap
And left me barren. Maybe a little earth
Will form about the roots and hold the rain,
Until the hills colour again with rich foliage.
Maybe a little while and then these hard-ribbed rocks,
Dulled by the wastage of the sun and wind,
Will glisten with tiny rivulets, moss-edged and cool.
Plant here your olives; it is not perhaps in vain.

TIME'S SUBTLE FEVER fills the flesh; stiffens
Imagination's sinews to a dull old age.
And all the fire and freedom of the soul:
The wonder of the blackbird's wing, stained
With the painting of the dark; the long watches
Of the winter night, cold till the chaffinch wakes
And shakes the leaves of morning with his song;
All this is yesterday. The wind that blew,
Rippling the water and the grass, life's breath,
Is gone. The sun is down and darkness hides
The splendour of the saffron fields of corn.
Breathe light! and with a little clay and spittle
Purge my sight, that I may know for one brief hour,
The crying moment, the intensity, I remember long ago.

THAT IS THE WAY of life. Best learn it young.
Yet of all truths it needs courage.
The courage that some would call faith.
Oh! the passion and the blindness of the heart.
God's will how it must end. There's no man can tell.
For some die in violence; some in penury; and some
In corruption and the sins of men. And some,
Pilgrims after that fleeting light, glimpsed at
A moment, like the moon, between the knotted branches
Of the storm, must die in martyrdom. They were born
At the first dull footfall on the road to Calvary.
Living by fire, they shall be quenched by fire.
Sorrow: but the craftsman's blow upon the anvil.
And death: the last tap, the mastery, the goal.

UNLOOSE the bolt beyond this barred
And stud-shod door, that I may see no more
This shadow or these walls, but feel the sunlight,
Smell the strong, salt wind. God's day! God's light!
This pace-trod prison of my mind is stale
With memories I have known since childhood.
I want the air of life to give me breath
To breathe; the pargetry of earth; the hayricks
Gaily dollied where the thatcher tops his stack;
Yes, the lapwing and the small sounds of the corn
And the summer's wealth of saffron splendour
When the mountain stream is veined like agate
In a moment's light. God's day! God's air!
Oh, the revelation I have forgotten!

THE CIRCLE of light widens like a growing fire:
It is the dawn. And as the consciousness of day
Diffuses in the East, the earth is born: a wonder
Of hills and valleys, caught from the darkness
To the first faint light. The moment brightness
On the blackbird's wing, oh! and the green, green earth!
The festival of music when on circling wings
The morning chorus robs the twilight of the fading moon.
And the crowding images that held such sway
Throughout the night, grow fainter with the stars.
The compass of man's fantasy is laid in siege;
Its boundaries broken. And like some Bartimeus,
Miraculously cured, he sees beyond the circuit
Of his dreams and marvels in his own humility.

THIS PEBBLE that I picked so idly from the shore,
Glistening, damp, polished with the coming
And going of the tide. See how many colours
Are prisoned there. A prism, if you look into it closely.
Yet, if I hold it at a distance from my eyes,
It is one with this beach of rusted terra-cotta.
And the sea, which threw it up into my hand,
That too is filled with many colours,
So many ripples riding towards the shore.

The stone dissolves; the sea and all its tumult
Fades: the sand, the sunlight and the cries of mews.
There is nothing or everything: what you see there;
Emptiness or creation: what you hear there;
Endless silence or the turbulent mystery of the wind.

TO LOVE this moment now, as men may love and share
The hospitality of a friend, giving and receiving again
In equal portion; not expecting more or less
Than their entitlement of time; allowing for personal needs.
Teach us to accept life simply, as the woodsman accepts,
Gathering the sticks of brushwood
For his cottage fire, binding his faggot bundle
In his hands. Teach us to forget as he forgets,
Living his unlust moments in the frozen fields:
All the longing for possession and position;
The weighing of men upon achievement; all that we argue
As our right and due: the debt and increment
Of life. And after the troubling of the waters,
Let us feel the stillness and know the light within.

I TOO have been transfixed with glory, my self,
My flesh, pure light. There was no sound, no song,
No music, no, nor the quickening wind to fill the
trees,
To fresh the stook gold corn; no sun, no cloud,
No sheaved sea shining, no, nor the crest and curvet
Of the white wind wave to image thought,
To miracle this being with the elemental fire.
But as the sky, unseen and silently, .
Fills at the morning with an inward light,
So was I filled, so shod. And as the blossom,
With all a springtime bounty, pours out
To fill the sky until it rills and sparkles,
Gems like a clear and crystal water, so were my limbs
Light filled, instinct with fire; so was I
Light to breathe, light sandalled and light clad.

MY FEET have trodden here, footmarks in the snow,
Imprints that take and give dark shadow,
The only colour in this white, white world.
Small yes! but something to show I passed this way
Among these hills, beneath the pines, weighed down
Like laden scales. Maybe a day, a week,
Or maybe more, the frost holds here their hollow,
Crisply edged, for other men to see;
And as they wander, idly to question:
'Who passed here? For what purpose and to where?'

And yet, who knows? Maybe within an hour
The dripping stillness will dissolve the shadow,
Leaving no imprint here, on the black, damp needles, that have
fallen
From the pines. What matter? Now or to-morrow, it is all the
same.

AND WE should be drowned at crossing, peace! peace!
It shall be so. The straining of the hawsers
Is not my straining; nor the twanging of the cordage,
Silvered by the spume, that is not my pain.
I am within the centre of the storm-wrack
And at the orbit of the swirling waves.
I am with the gulls and the cormorants
And the flying fish, walking the wavebacks
And the broken shadows. I am at the axis
Of the yellow misted moon caught in the cloud-wrack,
In my hands are the skeins of the hurricane
And the music of the tempest is the music of my song.
And standing at the pivot of the four winds
I keep my silence. Nor death, nor life rides there.

THERE is so little time, a little eating,
A little drinking and a short sleep, since yesterday
And yet nor memory, nor mind recalls the fleeting
Hours, the mood, the loving, nor the way
We thought. There is so little time,
So short in years, since first we saw
And wondered childlike at the rime
And freezing of the moon, the summer store
And freshness of the woods, the first chime
And dawning chorus when the birdsong greets the day.
So little time. And yet how careless time
Has squandered with our memory, how empty
Lies the store. Shall we not know our youth again:
The first fierce glory of the silver-shafted rain?

I AM OLD NOW. It must be more than seventy summers.
But time has lost its meaning. One year, more or less,
What matter? Sitting here, staring across the lawn,
I seem to see other gardens and other wagtails
In a start of silver grey; hear other songbirds
Gathering to carol and chorus in the trees.
Seventy summers! Tell us, they ask me, these children
Crowding at my knees. Seventy summers accumulating know-
ledge!
That's what they mean. Forgive me. I have grown old
In dreaming and imagining. I cannot tell you what I know.
There's an old rheum in my eyes and I must sleep.
The air grows cold and my chrysanthemums are still.
Tell them I had a dream, but it would take too long
In telling; besides it was bitter and is best not told.

SO I AM SITTING here in my chair after all these years,
With the few things I have collected in a lifetime;
Sitting in silence. There's too much
I can remember; too little that I can tell.
True, I have found a certain peace now,
But that's the sum of it; that is all I know.
And why should I tell old tales to teach the young?
They would not listen. They in their turn
Must live the cycle of my seasons, learning
The things I can remember; learning the things
I would forget. So I sit apart, waiting,
For I am an old man at the end of living
And my blood runs slow; and why should I learn
More sorrow, no different from what I know?

FORGIVE my anger, my son. It was no more
Than an old man's flail against humanity;
The last gust of a spent storm. Forgive me.
For if you will not forgive me, then who shall?
See, the wind that bent the sapling, sundered
The darkened heavens with a sulphurous cord
Of fire, is stilled, is gone. Now is the silence
Of a tranquil day, the gentle dew that cools
Earth's fever. All is still. Come, I am sorry.
There was pity at the root of it. Pity
That must sometimes bear the rod. There's cause
Enough for pity; yes, and for forgiveness too.
I know! I know! I should have learned long since!
But sometimes it is bitter and so hard to bear.

STRANGE really, after I had taught him from childhood days.
He would listen quietly, as though pondering, while I talked :
a little philosophy
Simply put; poetry, beginning with the ballads, then gradually
Feeling towards more complex things. I taught him the phrase
And rhythms of music and all I knew of the countryside: the
songs of a few
Birds, their colours, nesting and how to know them on the wing.
Wildflowers: carrying a book of reference as we wandered through
The fields. I also spoke to him a little of God. Yet, it's strange:
We met again after three years of parting. He'd grown
assertive, proud,
His manner abrupt. A man fighting others for imagined wrong;
Not holding strength and life within him as a man should.
And now, but what matter? I heard to-day he's dead.
And I sit here, an old man at the end of living, questioning
Whether a man can teach his fellow anything of how life should
be led?

FOR SEEING NOTHING with his eyes, he yet
Saw all things and knew their purposes.
Not detailed, as a man might see the leaves
Upon the alder or the colours of a chaffinch wing;
Not heard as who might hear the reedy music
Of the dotterel, calling across the fells.
Not these, but all creation was before him.
He stood, like Moses on Mount Sinai,
And from the barren solitude, found knowledge
Of the law. Hearing and seeing nothing,
He yet heard and understood. A great concourse
Of joy and sorrow. And at his side, he felt
The brotherhood of those who had passed before him.
He was of their company and his heart grew still.

AND WE SHOULD LOSE life, what have we lost?
Rather it is the ending of a journey, a homecoming
And a sound sleep. As we grow old we learn these things:
But young, what are such thoughts to them?
With the restless blood of spring so heady
In the veins; the quest of living; the mood
Of mastery; the jesting hour; laughter
And a stolen kiss, stretched out loose-limbed
On an April afternoon. Let them laugh. And let the old
Keep silent. For all too soon the urgent pulse
Grows weary and the loneliness of age
Creeps in upon them before they are aware.
Keep silent. Why should they wake to-morrow
Knowing they too are sick?

YOU HAVE YET to feel the blood run slow;
To learn the easing of the restlessness of life;
To find how great affairs become of little moment
And all the enterprise of flesh,
A thing experienced and grown stale.
There's nothing new. Nothing unsewn, untasted.
Nothing to excite our dreams beyond the waiting.
You ask if it is hard to go? No, no!
The years and the flesh dissolve. Like snow
Melted by the warm rain into earth, so is parting.
Our steps grow slower; the wish to hurry
Gone. Let me ask you your question
As you will understand it: Is it so difficult
To fall asleep beside the fire?

IS IT SO HARD to leave the shore? to loose
The hold and trust the movement of the waters?
Is it so hard to leave the thoughts? to lose
The personal dreams that crowd upon the darkness?
Let them pass. They are but fantasy:
A light-filled cloud; a summer that is gone.
See, the wood is dead; the bark is brittle;
The warm days of the year will never bring again
The soft and feathered greenness round the bole.
Forget it then. There is no substance here.
No grief. Nothing to ache the heart.
Only the stiffening limbs and an old pain
That is at best forgotten. Let us be going.
This that you fear for, is but to-morrow.

NOW IT IS TIME TO GO, I would go quickly.
No partings, no waiting. No, though my friends
Would wish to hold me, though they would wish me stay,
They do not know. There is no regretting;
And though in my years I have loved my living,
Nothing I would not leave. The lightness of my body!
As though the shackles of imperfect flesh
Had fallen clear. No pain; and but for a little thirst
I feel no wants; and that too will cure.
There is a daybreak and a joy; but not the joy
Of loving, living, striving and achieving;
It is a joy that's filled with light
As full as is the fullness of the water. And like a child
No fears, no fretfulness; only laughter and a wonderment.

THE FEVER of my blood is spent. The night's
Long ghostliness is over. I know myself again.
And yet, not spent, not over. It is still
The end. I know this sweet morning's peace,
Ease after troubled journeying, is but a pause,
Mercifully granted before the last fever, the last
Cold sweat. You lay your hand on mine to quiet me.
You're crying though you would not have me know.
Why? Why? I lose nothing, being nothing. No more do you.
Only a man filled with conflicting emotions,
Who, try as he would, could not shape destiny
Or stay the falling of a star; who, for his friends
Achieved no happiness; a father who knew not his own.
Do not fret; a few moments and that will resolve all.

LIE DOWN! Lie down! The waiting hours
Are over. A last sleep and so to end.
There is no striving here. The restless spirit,
Grown tired and grown still, sleeps
With the unruffled sweetness of a child.
Death! No mother here on earth is granted
By her child, such trust. See, I here lay aside
All I have gathered from the brokery of men:
Fear, desire, distrust and all the attitude
Of self-defence. Here to your mercy,
I submit, humble, naked as I was born,
And with a quiet mind.
For the rebellion and anger of the day: peace.
For my homecoming: a submission from sin.

I MUST TURN my head aside upon the pillow.
No, please don't go. I cannot bear to be alone.
And yet I am ashamed that you should see me cry.
Once my spirit would have met you; anxious
To make you laugh. But now, pain makes here
A burden of my limbs; there is no moment left
Forgetful of the effort of my breath; no strength
To pass beyond these ever-conscious boundaries
Of the flesh. Our ills grow selfish in despite
Our will. Forgive me! Think that I died before.
Indeed this is not me, but some poor spirit
Imprisoned here who has no ease to show he loves.
Oh, I had thought to keep you company all through
This long night; but I have grown tired too soon.

FOR A WHILE the tattered falcon endured
The rough lash of the hail and then sought covert
In the driven trees. But now the storm is over;
The birds ride high on easy wings. All is still.
I have passed beyond the day's pain; beyond
My death; the loneliness of the years is upon me.
You talk to me of things I have forgotten.
Let me be. Lay by. Draw to the curtains and to bed.
The little task completed, whether ill-done
Or well. Let us forget all that we planned;
All the unfinished things. My stomach for them
Has vanished with the failing years. How far
They were beyond our scope! How far beyond
Our sacrifice! Good-bye. And it is lightly said.

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